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## SOME REMARKS ON THE POEMS ASCRIBED TO JOSEPH BEN ABRAHAM HAKOHN

(*ŒOR.*, IV, pp. 621-34.)

ONE of the most worthy and most important tasks deserving the best efforts of Jewish scholarship is the task of making the treasures of the Genizah accessible. This, of course, cannot be accomplished by one man nor in one generation. It will require the combined labours of many scholars pursued through several generations. For this reason we should be grateful to each and every worker in this field who helps to bring us nearer to the goal.

Dr. Marmorstein has already, on several occasions, shown his interest in this branch of research, and has put us under obligation for a number of Genizah publications. His latest contribution brings before us a number of poems which are quite interesting. In the following remarks I merely wish to draw attention to a number of textual errors as well as to a few errors of judgement.

From the fact that the poet compares the events of his life with those of Joseph in the Bible, Dr. Marmorstein rushes to the conclusion that the poet's name was Joseph. If this be a criterion, we might assume that any one comparing his misfortunes to those of Job does *a priori* bear the same name, and probably hails from the Land of Uz. Even if we were inclined to acquiesce in such a rash conclusion, we could not do so in this particular case. For Dr. Marmorstein himself calls our attention to the fact that the name of the writer is mentioned in the verse which reads: *כִּן יַעֲשֶׂה עִם עֲבָדָיו בֶּן אִמְתּוֹ אֲבִרָהִם הַכֹּהֵן* (III. 46-7). Now, if *עֲבָדָיו בֶּן אִמְתּוֹ* refers to the poet, and *אֲבִרָהִם הַכֹּהֵן* to his father, the word *בֶּן* must be missing between *אִמְתּוֹ* and *אֲבִרָהִם*, else we are

confronted with the unpleasant alternative of reading אמתו אברהם הכהן ('his maid-servant Abraham Hakohen'). But aside from this, is it necessary to draw attention to the fact that the Psalmist speaks of himself as עבדך בן אמתך?

There cannot be any doubt, therefore, that the poet is Abraham Hakohen himself, not his son. That he is identical with Abraham ben Joseph Hakohen whom Dr. Marmorstein found in Cod. Adler No. 223, is a matter that cannot be decided by the meagre data before us, כמה אברהם הכהן איכא בשוקא דגנייה; nor can we agree with Dr. Marmorstein that the phrase כי ריעות זרים אהבתי ודברי אבות השלכתי (IV. 31) refers to the relation of the poet to the Karaites. As a matter of fact, this particular verse does not refer to the poet, but to the Jewish people. In this, as well as in the preceding stanza, the poet speaks of the Maccabean period.

As to the phrase שנת תתקנ"ד לחרבן הבית, it may be remarked that in all probability it does not belong at the head of the first, but at the end of the fourth poem. For it is most improbable that the poet would commence his composition with a superscription of the date, and even if we were to admit that the superscription belongs to the poem, we have no way of explaining the line ינקום נקמתי מיד מדיני, which separates the date from the poem. This line cannot possibly be the beginning of the poem, since the latter is written in alphabetical order. A plausible explanation is, that what Dr. Marmorstein took to be the first leaf of the MS. is really the last, in which case Poem I would follow Poem IV, and the line in question as well as the date would be the end of Poem IV, instead of the beginning of Poem I. This supposition is made all the more plausible by the fact that the line ינקום נקמתי מיד מדיני rhymes with the last phrase of Poem IV.

It is very much to be regretted that the editor has not seen fit to describe the manuscript properly. He gives us no information as to the size of the manuscript, the number of pages, the character of the writing, and where the pages and lines begin and end. His method of indicating *lacunae* seems to be arbitrary. He also failed to note the scheme of rhymes which is always of great help

in deciphering such ancient texts. For instance, in the first poem, it is to be noted that up to the letter ה each two letters have one set of rhymes, while from the letter ט to the end, each letter has its own individual rhyme. In the second poem each two letters have one individual rhyme throughout the poem, making altogether eleven sets of rhymes. In the third poem, again, each letter has its individual rhyme.

It is true that the manuscript is in a very defective state, and it is practically impossible to restore it, yet, if the editor had studied it more carefully, he could have solved many of the obscure passages which now confront us on almost every line of the poems.

## I

1. 2. ועברו, read ונברו.

1. 3. קינים והנה והי (Ezek. 2. 10), read וקינונים, analogous to ורינונים.

11. 4-8. While it is impossible to restore these lines, yet, if we bear in mind that each two letters of the acrostic have one set of rhymes, it becomes possible to indicate at least the beginning of each acrostic as well as the rhyme. Thus the acrostic of the ג and the ד must have extended from the word גברתי. The acrostic of the ה began with ה' חסר (not חסרה) and ended with וצרתי, the acrostic of the ו began with וחלא (l. 6). Since the rhyme is the same in the two acrostics ה and ו, we may substitute for בדרשי (l. 8), בחרתי to rhyme with וצרתי (l. 6).

1. 9. Supply at the beginning of line כי לא משלתי, and read ברוחי instead of לרוחי. Comp. Prov. 16. 32.

1. 10. ולא מצאתי למצתי צרי, read וצאתי למכת צרי. Comp. Jer. 8. 22.

1. 12. Read טוב מות מחיים אמרתי, כי צר לא חס.

1. 14. Read ויורקו בי חן אחר חן, שיהי היתי לכל מנוד לארץ. Comp. Ps. 69. 13; 44. 15; Prov. 23. 29.

1. 15. If the acrostic of the letter כ would begin with the word כילא, as the editor indicates, the preceding phrase would have to belong to the previous stanza. This, however, is impossible on

account of the rhyme. Read, therefore, כִּזְזַת בְּרוֹעַ מַעֲלָלִי. *Ibid.*  
כִּילָה חֲמוּסִי, read כִּילָה חֲמוּסִי.

l. 18. מְרוֹמָה. Comp. the expression דִּין מְרוֹמָה, b. Sanhedrin 32<sup>b</sup>.

l. 19. בְּבֵית כָּלָא בַעֲשׂוֹתִי. Comp. Jer. 37. 15.

l. 20. נִגְרוּ בְּבִכּוֹת, read נִגְרוּ בְּבִכּוֹת, comp. Lam. 3. 49.

l. 21. בִּיד כָּל צַר וּמִינִי, read יִמּוֹנִי, and comp. Isa. 49. 26.

„ וּלְקַחַת מִמֶּנִּי, read וּלְקַחַת מִמּוֹנִי.

„ וְאוֹמֵר עַד מָתִי ד' אֱלֹהִים. The editor refers to Isa. 6. 11.  
But this reading yields no rhyme. Read, therefore, עַד מָתִי אֱלֹהִים, read  
אֲדוֹנִי, and comp. Joshua 22. 22.

l. 22. וְהוֹצִיאֹנִי מִרְעָה אֶל רְעָה, read וְהוֹצִיאֹנִי מִרְעָה אֶל רְעָה, comp.  
Jer. 9. 2.

l. 25. Read וּבֵיתָם תִּהְיוּ.

ll. 25-6. וְהִנֵּה תִנְקָה וְהִנֵּה תִנְקָה: יִקְחוּ מִמֶּנּוּ וְהִנֵּה תִנְקָה, read

פָּצוּ עָלַי בְּפִיהֶם וְשָׁחֲקוּ

וְנָמוּ קָחוּ מִמּוֹנִי וְנָקָה תִנְקוּ

ll. 26-8. These three lines are entirely unintelligible in  
Marmorstein's text, yet with but slight changes they become very  
clear. Read :

צוּר עַד מָתִי קִנְאוּתֵינוּ לֹא תִקְנָא

וְתִשְׁמַע שְׁוַעֲתֵינוּ וְתִעֲנֶנָּה

וְתִרְוִיחַ לָנוּ מִכָּל אוֹיֵב וּמִצָּעָה

וְתִהְיֶה סְבִיבוֹתֵינוּ חוֹנָה

For the last line, comp. 1 Sam. 26. 5.

l. 28. כִּי הוֹצַר לָנוּ צָר, read כִּי הוֹצַר לָנוּ צָרִים.

l. 32. Supply the word הָיָה after כָּל אָבִי.

## II

If this poem had been printed in the proper verse form, it  
would have been found to consist of eleven quatrains, each  
quatrain having one uniform rhyme, and comprising two letters of  
the alphabetical acrostic with two verses to each letter. The last  
verse of each of the first seven quatrains is a quotation from  
Ps. 130.

ll. 1-2. באנחת . . . לפניך. It is evident that the first couplet cannot end with לפניך, since the rhyme of this quatrain ends in ני, nor does דיוני give satisfaction. Read, therefore, as follows :

אזעק אליך שוכן מעוני

מקוצר רוח ומרוב יגוני

[בשפכי שיח] לפניך באנחת לבי ודמעת עיני

ממעמקים קראתיך אדני.

ll. 3-4. Here, again, the word ומלארוב gives no meaning. I would suggest reading ואם לא רוב דאתי ועמלי, but this also is not satisfactory, because we should expect this verse to begin with the letter ד.

ll. 4-6. These three lines comprise the third quatrain, having the letter ה and ו in acrostic. From the last word of the quatrain, יעמוד, it is evident that we should expect three other words ending in ור, but in the text before us we find only one עוד in l. 5. It is also evident that we cannot begin the second couplet with the word וחם as M. does, since we must have two lines in each couplet. Aside from this, the phrase ושל קיבול התשובה has no meaning. Equally obscure is the passage ועד מחצי הנפש תקבל וחם עלי, and M.'s reference to B. Berakot 7<sup>b</sup> and 10<sup>b</sup> does not help to make it clear. To clear away these difficulties, I suggest reading as follows :

הלא אתה הבטחת מראש כי קיבול התשובה תִּחַמַּד

כי אין אדם שלא חטא עוד

לעד יום צאת הנפש תקבלו ותסעוד

כי אם עונות תשמור יה ד' מי יעמוד

For the first line, comp. the well-known passage ועל התשובה ועל מראש הבטחתנו (ערבית לוי"כ) and Ezek. 18. 23; for the second line, comp. 1 Kings 8. 46; for the third line, comp. B. Berakot 10<sup>a</sup>: אפילו חרב חדה מונחת על צוארו של אדם אל ימנע עצמו מן הרהמים, ועד יום מותו חכה לו אם ישוב מיד תקבלו (מוסף לר"ה).

8. רוחה, read רוח.

1. 11. ד' תקרא דרור, read לשבויים תקרא דרור, comp. Isa. 61. 1; *ibid.* משמורת, read משומרים.

1. 12. ומרוב עונים, the rhyme demands עולם.

1. 15<sup>a</sup>. Comp. Lam. 3. 56; 15<sup>b</sup>, comp. Ps. 68. 6.

11. 19-20. The editor failed to indicate the letter ת of the acrostic, and through faulty punctuation overlooked the rhymes. Read as follows:

שמך עלינו נקרא, שמור יחידתי מכל צרה  
תנחמני וזאת אזכרה, אברך המלך הגדול הנורא

### III

This poem consists of twenty-two quatrains, each quatrain having one uniform rhyme.

11. 1-2. Read

אפחד בכל יום ונפשי תזעק  
בעת נטשני צור וחרבו [עלי הריק] (7. Ezek. 28. comp.)  
בבית כיפה שמני ואין לי פורק  
אֶתָּה נפשי . . . . .

1. 3. The phrase כאשר עבר על יוסף could not possibly be the end of the preceding stanza, since the rhyme requires a word that ends in ק. The acrostic, again, demands here a word beginning with ב. I therefore suggest reading

בן שבע עשרה שנה יוסף כאשר התחלה רעתו

11. 5 and 9. The editor omitted to indicate the missing words by the usual sign of dots.

1. 13. כי נם להם, read כי נם (?) לנו.

1. 16. וכל רע ומחרף אותי יסובבה, read וכל רעי מחרף אותי יסובבה.

1. 17. הזעיר, read העיר.

1. 18. טרחו; אוהבי עלי הגעיר, read אוהבי עליה יעיר, read טרח.

1. 19. Remove the second comma and read שם ברגליו ויפילו לכלא.

1. 20. The phrase אין לו נצר ידו רעה has no meaning, and

besides, the rhyme requires a word ending in לָא, or לָה. Read, therefore, as follows: וַאִין הִלָּה מִכֶּם. אִין לוֹ בָּצַר יִרִיד וְהִלָּה, comp. 1 Sam. 22. 8. The scribal error can easily be explained. The יד of ירו are the last two letters of ירִיד, while the ו belongs to the next word. The ה lost its left stroke and became a ר.

1. 22. נַחְמוֹת, read תְּחִנּוֹת.

1. 24. Read וּמַצְלִיחַ וְחָכֵם. Comp. Gen. 39. 23; 41. 39.

1. 25. בָּל רֵאוּיִם, read רֵאוּיִם.

1. 27. Supply לְאַרְץ after מַחֲוִין.

11. 27-9. The words כִּנְטֵרְתִּי, כִּנְטֵרְדִּים, and כִּנְטֵרְדִּים yield no meaning. Read, therefore, as follows:

מֵאֲבִיו וּמֵאֲחֵיו נִפְרָד, וּבִאֲשֶׁת אֲדֹנָיו כִּי פָתָה מֵרֵד  
גַּם אֲנִי מֵאֲחֵי וְרֵיעִי כִּנְטֵרְדִּי, לְבִי נָמַס כְּמִים הַמוֹגֵרִים בַּמּוֹרֵד

For the last phrase comp. Mic. 1. 4.

1. 29. Instead of a period there should be several dots indicating the *lacuna* which may be supplied by the word וַיִּמָּאֵן. Comp. Gen. 37. 35.

1. 30. בְּמוֹתוֹ. The rhyme demands a word ending in תָּם. Read perhaps כְּמוֹתָם (like them).

„ נַחְמוּנִי, read גַּם אֲנִי נַחְמוֹתִי.

1. 32. Supply הַכִּירוּהוּ at the end of line.

1. 33. A *lacuna* should have been indicated after הַחֹסֶד. Supply, perhaps, עֲשׂוּהוּ.

1. 34. בְּשָׁלוֹם, the rhyme requires a word ending in קִים. Read perhaps מְרִיקִים. Comp. Gen. 42. 35.

1. 36. אֲנִי אֲחִיכֶם יוֹסֵף לִי. The editor has failed to see that the rhyming words of this stanza end in לוֹ. Read, therefore, אֲנִי אֲחִיכֶם. יוֹסֵף, נִבְהָלוּ. Comp. Gen. 45. 3.

1. 40. קוֹלוֹ שְׁמוֹעַ, read שְׁמָעוּ, comp. Gen. 45. 16.

11. 41-2. כַּעֲבָדִים אִישׁ עַל חֻבּוֹ, read כַּעֲבָדִים. אִישׁ שְׁחֻבּוֹ.

1. 43. רָאָה פָּנֶיךָ, read רָאָה.

1. 45. בְּרִית פִּזְרָת, read בְּרִית כְּרוֹת.

1. 48. תַּמְחָה אֲשַׁמְתִּי וְתַמְהָר יִשְׁוּעָתִי, read תַּמְחָה. . . יִשְׁוּעָתִי.

1. 50. Read אֶל תִּשְׁמָחִי אוֹיְבֵתִי כִּי נִפְלָתִי קִמְתִּי וַי' עִרְנִי.



## IV

This poem cannot be understood properly without a knowledge of its technique. Its construction is as follows: every stanza consists of five verses with one uniform rhyme, followed by a refrain which consists of four verses with one uniform rhyme, and one of the eighteen benedictions. In the opening stanza the poet states that this hymn was composed to commemorate some great misfortune which befell him, while in the refrain he goes into detail, stating that on the fifteenth day of Kislev he was unjustly thrown into prison, and concludes with an appeal for divine mercy for the sake of Abraham, ending with the first of the eighteen benedictions, בא"י מִן אַבְרָהָם. Altogether there are eighteen stanzas followed by the same refrain, excepting that each subsequent refrain mentions some other Biblical character and concludes with another of the eighteen benedictions. Of course these historic personages are not mentioned by name, but are alluded to by some Biblical phrase. In this way our poem reproduces all the eighteen benedictions, and like the well-known litany, מי שענה, enumerates most of the important Biblical characters. It may be worth while to note, by the way, that in the benedictions the poem follows the Palestinian Ritual, with the exception of the benedictions אלהי דוד בונה ירושלם and מבטח לצדיקים.

For the sake of clearness I reproduce here the first stanza and its refrain, in the form in which it should have been printed, incidentally correcting the text in a few places:

אזכור ואזכירה מרירת יום זה  
ואשר הביאו עלי עונותי אחזה  
השיגוני לכדוני אותי לבזה  
עֲנִיתִי וקמו [בי אויבי] נפשי ונמתי הבזה  
יקבל צור שואלו ומשמן בשר צריו יִרְוֶה  
בכסלו בחמשה עשר בו הושלכתי לבית כלא  
ללא אמת אזי חמס מעלה  
עד ישקיף ברחמיו עושה פלא  
ויננני ויצילני בוכות שאמר לו אחר הרברים האלה  
בא"י מִן אַבְרָהָם

It should be noted that from the fourth stanza to the end of the poem the refrain is abbreviated, a fact which will help us solve many of the obscure passages. The abbreviation is done by omitting the second line entirely and giving the first word of the third line (עד) followed by the fourth and fifth, which are new in each refrain.

l. 10. ביר משנה, read *מְעַנֶּה*.

ll. 12-13. יחיה רוחי [ויצילני, read יחיה רוחי . . . ועקר והושם עתידה, read יחיה רוחי . . . ועקר והושם עתידה] נעקר והושם עקירה [בזכות, comp. Gen. 22. 9. The reference is to Isaac.

l. 14. The rhyme demands the word בחלום after הראני.

l. 15. Read ואנזור תפלה וצום.

l. 19. בזכות נם לְבָן מִי אֱלֹהָ, read בזכות נם לבן מר אלה, referring to Jacob, comp. Gen. 48. 8.

„ החוב שחב, זכרתי החובשת,

l. 23. Here we have the first abbreviation of the refrain. The word עד is not to be taken with יחנני, but is the beginning of the third line of the refrain. The fourth line of the refrain should read יחנני דעה בצדקת נם סלה נא לעם אלה, referring to Moses, comp. Num. 14. 19.

l. 29. The word עד is the beginning of the third line of the refrain, and is immediately followed by the fourth, which should read יקבל תשובתי בזכות ויתן את הקטרת ויכפר על עם אלה, referring to Aaron, comp. Num. 17. 12.

ll. 33-4. The same abbreviation of refrain. The reference here is to Phineas, comp. Num. 25. 11.

l. 35. Read לאבות [ברית כרת].

l. 39. עד ויצילני בזכות, read עמו יצילך, העמיד חימה לעם אלה. The first word עד being the beginning of the third line of the refrain, the rest is the fourth line. Reference here is to Joshua. Comp. Joshua 10. 12.

l. 44. The text is very defective. Read perhaps בזכות [אמרה, referring to Deborah. Comp. Judg. 5. 9.

l. 48. בזכות נם ענו בי נגר יי, read נם ענו בי נגדי, referring to Samuel. Comp. 1 Sam. 12. 3.

ll. 50-1. שומע אנקת [אביונים], לאסירים, read שומע אנקת אסירים, תקרא דרור.

11. 52-3. בזכות [משכמו ומעלה גבה] מעם אלה . . . מעם אלה, read בזכות, referring to Saul. Comp. 1 Sam. 9. 2.

1. 57. The fourth line of the refrain should read צדקני בצדקת, referring to David, comp. 2 Sam. 24. 17.

11. 58-64. Judging from the sequence of the benedictions, as well as from that of the Biblical personages, these seven lines represent one stanza. On the other hand, we find here two sets of rhymes, one ending in שי and the other in לי, and the paragraph is too large for five verses. We must, therefore, assume that for some reason the poet used here a stanza of ten verses with two sets of rhymes.

1. 58. בהשתטף עלי נפשי, read בהתעטף, comp. Jonah 2. 8.

11. 59-60. Read כנים עלו עלי [מכף רגלי ועד ראשי], עד . . . מרעים קמו [בי].

1. 64. Read בזכות [גם בנה בניתי] בית זבול לעם אלה, referring to Solomon, comp. 1 Kings 8. 13.

1. 68. The reference is undoubtedly to Elijah. The allusion may perhaps be restored as follows: [בזכות גם עניי וידעו העם] האלה. Comp. 1 Kings 18. 37.

1. 73. בזכות גם ויהי נא פי שנים עם אלה, read בזכות גם ויהי נא פי שנים, referring to Elisha, comp. 2 Kings 2. 9.

1. 75. וחמתך, read וחמסך.

1. 78. The reference is to Isaiah. Comp. Isa. 1. 2.

11. 82-3. Read ותחזיר עבודה לביתך בזכות בצדק הוכיח לעם אלה, referring to Jeremiah, or probably to Hezekiah. Comp. והוכיח, במישור לענוי ארץ, Isa. 11. 4.

1. 88. Read בצדקת צורת הבית ראה והניד לעם אלה, referring to Ezekiel. Comp. Ezek. 43. 10.

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